A REPUBLIC WITHOUT REPUBLICANS

Our work in Germany took us into academic and political circles, especially to leading circles in the labor movement. We were aliens but no longer outsiders. We watched the death struggle of the Weimar Republic from inside and took an active part in that losing fight. As in Russia in 1917, this was, basically, the struggle between moderates on one side and the united forces of red and reactionary extremists on the other. Practically, in terms of parties, moderate Socialists and the Catholic Center were defending the Republic against the onslaught of the Communists and Monarchists (Nazis, in the later phase of the struggle), who occasionally fought each other but usually acted in unison against the forces of the Republic.

Perhaps the moderates were doomed in advance. Under the Weimar Constitution, Germany had all the attributes of a republic: an elected President, an elected Reichstag, elected provincial legislatures, a parliamentary government. It also had universal suffrage and all civil liberties. It failed in only one attribute of a republic—the republican spirit.

Born of defeat, the Weimar Republic had no appeal to the masses of the people. Its flag—black, red, and gold—meant little to the man in the street, was despised by the military, hated by the right, ridiculed by the extreme left. Reactionary farmers described the colors of the Republic as black-red-yellow dung. The government sued the men who had used these words in a public address. The defense attorneys displayed the flag of the Republic in the courtroom and pointed out that the stripe officially called gold was not of gold color, but rather yellow, like dung. The court sided with the defense, using the case to humiliate the Republic. School children were taught to revere the glorious past of the Empire and to despise republican institutions. Pictures of Hindenburg and the Kaiser were on the walls in all middle-class apartments. Good bourgeois who disliked the last Kaiser and were critical of the provincial princes had even less enthusiasm for the Weimar Constitution. Socialist youths sang cheerfully, "The Republic is not all, socialism is our goal!" For the left-wing Socialists, the Weimar Republic was associated with the murder of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg.

During our summer vacation in 1923, we went to a tiny city perched in the hills of Thuringia. The station was decorated with imperial flags. The city was illuminated, and jubilant crowds led by bands were parading the streets. We took a room in a tourist house and asked the elderly landlady about the cheerful demonstrations. "Oh, we are so happy!" she replied. "Our beloved princes have got their palace back."